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A DEFENSE OF LIBERTY. By the Honorable Oliver Brett. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

"Democracy, like every other political device," writes the author of *A Defense of Liberty*—which is really a defense of Liberalism—"has two roads on which it may travel, backwards towards State control, or forwards toward individual liberty." Individual liberty, Mr. Brett apparently regards as a goal rather than a direction, if one may judge from the following passage: "Many people who are afraid of the damp never walk on the grass except when there is a notice forbidding them to do it. All decent men exceed the speed limit, and endeavor to elude the tax-collector. For the instinct of personal liberty is, fortunately for humanity, deeply ingrained in human nature." Such a pronouncement, when compared with the off-hand dictum that Julius Cæsar was almost certainly the greatest human being that ever lived, does not inspire confidence—even in a lifelong admirer of Cæsar!

The instinct of insubordination is, then, wholly good, and the instinct of submissiveness generally bad; and this is to be our touchstone. There is in this book hardly a trace of recognition of the idea that progress may be in the nature of a spiral in which humanity seems to move now forward and now backward, both conservative and liberal forces helping to determine the actual movement and its real direction. On the contrary, there must be no compromise between the two political forces. Though political history is simply the story of the long struggle for adjustment between liberty and government, the main thing is to be liberal.

Really, Mr. Brett's main idea is that Socialism is not progressive but reactionary. Curiously enough Mr. Hyndman uses the same argument—or, more specifically, the argument that Socialism is nothing new, but rather a return to primitive and formerly successful ways—as a justification of his creed. It would seem as if the controversial value of this half truth might by now be regarded as exhausted. Absolute State control is, of course, reactionary and pernicious, and one does not see to what else Socialism tends, but it is not true that everything not individualistic is reactionary; increased sympathy, increased coöperation for the good of all mankind—these things, however arrived at, are not reactionary but progressive. Similarly, in so far as Socialism involves sudden or rapid change, it is not conservative but radical.

In short, in talking about Conservatism, Liberalism, Radicalism, Socialism and the like, one is always in danger of merely playing with words. The terms—especially the vague pair, *Conservatism* and *Liberalism*—are scarcely subtle or definite enough to be useful in dealing with the facts. Thus, one finds in Mr. Brett's book chiefly platitudes, such as the statement that "Human development rather than national must be our political objective; laws and States exist merely for the purpose of increasing the private happiness of those who live under them and in them; they are not and cannot be ends in themselves"—and passages that imply sweeping conclusions, like one already quoted.